The Christian News-Letter

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Edited by KATHLEEN BLISS

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THE NEWS-LETTER appears this fortnight in a new dress, made possible by progressive increases in our paper ration. Our first word is one of gratitude to our readers who have for so long put up with the strain of small type, crowded paragraphs and narrow margins on eyesight and patience.

NEWS-LETTER

New Format

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SUPPLEMENT

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OUR NEW FORMAT

We should like to take our readers into our confidence about the inner significance of this change of format. Our first object in making the change is to keep faith with our readers who accepted our crowded pages as a temporary necessity. We have taken careful note of readers' opinions and are retaining the same size of page in order that the News-Letter may be easily slipped into pocket or handbag. In future there will be sixteen pages in each issue instead of twelve. The type will be larger, and the margins wider.

Our other reason for making the change is that we want to bring about a substantial increase in circulation. A more readable and attractive format is one step towards this end. We have paper enough to take on 5,000 new subscribers immediately. Our chief reason for seeking to increase circulation is simply that we are encouraged to believe that there are far more than 5,000 people in the world who would subscribe to the News-Letter if they knew of it. But another

reason is that we may avoid raising the subscription rate. The subscription was increased from 10s. to 12s. 6d. per annum in 1940, when the printed postage rate was raised from ½d. to 1d. In 1943 a change was made from a weekly News-Letter and a fortnightly Supplement to a fortnightly Letter and Supplement, and the size of the pages was halved in order to meet the enforced cut in our paper consumption. These changes, especially the saving of postage, enabled us to meet the steadily rising costs. But further rises in costs have now outstripped our economies. To give only one example, our Christian News-Letter envelopes which in 1940 cost 9s. 1d. per 1,000, now cost 27s. per 1,000 (hence the warm welcome extended to all used envelopes returned to the office), and there has been a proportionate all-round increase in the cost of printing and office supplies, and in wages and all other expenses. Many journals have been helped through this financial crisis by large increases in their revenue from advertisements.

After careful consideration we have decided not to increase the subscription. Among those who value the News-Letter most highly there are many to whom a 12s. 6d. subscription is a considerable outlay. On the other hand, an encouraging number of readers add a few shillings to their annual cheque. If the 12s. 6d. annual subscription could in future be regarded as a *minimum* subscription, any additions made will help us to get through our financial year successfully.

An increase of circulation would also help to improve the contents of the News-Letter. The News-Letter is a non-profit-making undertaking and there are no shareholders to be paid. If any margins of profit accrue from enlarged circulation they will go to expanding the work of the Frontier. That work is ripe for development. The more it can be extended, the better is the prospect of the News-Letter being able to give the kind of distinctive material which its readers expect of it.

Most of the new subscriptions which reach us come from people who have been given a copy of the News-Letter by

a friend, or have had it recommended to them in conversation, at a meeting or from the pulpit. We greatly appreciate the efforts of News-Letter readers who introduce new subscribers. We have an eight-page pamphlet in the press describing the News-Letter and some of the activities that lie behind it, and will be glad to supply copies to those who can make good use of them in personal ways ; the pamphlet is not intended for indiscriminate free distribution, for which the cost would be prohibitive.

We also hope for a considerable extension of the use of the News-Letter by Church and other groups. A number of such groups already avail themselves of the special rate for group subscriptions. These include Church groups of many kinds, branches of Toc H, Christian Auxiliary Movement, Y.M.C.A., Y.W.C.A. Among our keenest groups of readers are the higher forms of a number of schools.

THE RETURN OF GERMAN PRISONERS

A fortnight ago a scheme was announced by the Cabinet for the repatriation of German prisoners of war from this country, at an approximate rate of 15,000 a month. The announcement was made partly as a result of public pressure on the Government, clearly expressed in a memorial to the Government signed by many leading citizens, and partly because of the decline in morale among prisoners, including an increase of bitterness and hopelessness, and a rise in the number of suicides. In the end all the arguments of expediency, including the lack of food for them in Germany, the rightness of holding a labour force in this country as a form of reparations and the desperate need in this country for man power, broke down before the rising conviction that it was unjust to keep men for months on end without any hope of a termination of their captivity and a return to their families whom many of them have not seen for years.

Even so, it will take more than two years for the 394,000 eligible prisoners to be repatriated, and two years is a long time. The Bible contains many references to the sorrows of captives and to the fact that no privilege or good treatment can atone for the loss of freedom and the separation from

native land. Nobody doubts the justice of insisting that Germany must be made to repair (so far as she can) the damage which she has brought on Europe, and that her young men should work with their hands is part of the toll. But there is a very fine line to be drawn between a just exaction of restitution from a whole people and the imposition of a disproportionately heavy burden on the shoulders of a few. One of the main themes of the Old Testament is the emergence of the people of Israel from a tribal morality in which the sin of Achan is visited on all his family, men, women and children alike, into an acceptance of individual responsibility—" the soul that sinneth *it* shall die ". The Germans brushed aside this principle. Frenchmen wrecked German troop trains. Frenchmen—any Frenchmen—must pay the price with their lives. Whether they had any personal share in the incident did not matter. Documents are now coming to light in Germany which show how the whole legal system was changed by the Nazis. The protection of the party in power became the only criterion of justice, and justice ceased to be primarily concerned with individual responsibility under the law. A victorious nation stands in a position *vis-à-vis* its vanquished foe in which the conviction that justice has to do with individuals is difficult to preserve. These or those Germans have to be turned out of their homes to make room for B.A.O.R. wives, and these others have to face another two years of compulsory labour, because the German nation is responsible for letting loose destruction on Europe. But it is dangerous for the conception of justice to call this " just ".

Coupled with the announcement of repatriation is a Cabinet promise of improvement in conditions for prisoners of war. Some day adequate and detailed reports of the educational work done in prisoner of war camps by the Government and voluntary organizations will be published, and they will make interesting reading. Music, drama, crafts, discussion groups, language classes, religious services and a great many other activities have been keenly supported at least until the last few months, when declining morale has shown itself in waning interest in all such pursuits. This

decline in morale, which is universally remarked upon by all who visit prisoner of war camps, is not due solely to uncertainty about going home. There are other things which rankle deeply enough to affect the attitude of prisoners to the British people and the mood in which they will return home. One is the matter of payment for their labour. 158,000 prisoners are employed by the Ministry of Agriculture, and 50,000 by the War Office. Those in agriculture are paid from 3s. to 6s. per week, but their employers pay the Government the prevailing wages. Most prisoners think that the British Government, even when the expenses of maintenance are discharged, is making a substantial profit from their labour. Prisoners frequently refer to themselves as slave labour and remark that their own slave labourers were well paid and free to move about the towns in which they worked.

Another ingredient in the decline in morale is the strictness of the non-fraternization rules. They have far less freedom than Italian prisoners had and no contact with British people outside their work. They may go to church in the local village, but are not allowed to speak to any members of the congregation. Their only currency is camp money, and no prisoner can buy even so little as a few cigarettes in a shop. Many prisoners have been keenly interested in discussions on British democracy, and have worked hard at learning English. But there is all the difference in the world between discussing the British way and purpose and experiencing it at first hand, and that German prisoners of war should go back without having seen anything of British democracy at work is a great pity and a great waste.

GERMANY'S LOST MEN

One of the most desperate needs of Germany is for the return of her younger men. The lack of them is not only holding up economic progress, but is distorting and destroying the life of the younger women of Germany. At the end of June the total number of German prisoners held in the British Commonwealth and within Germany itself by the army on the Rhine was 520,000. France holds more than

a million German prisoners, many of them working in coal mines. The Soviet Union holds an unknown number, estimated at three million, who work in labour camps. The absence of so many young men destroys family life and helps to account for the rising in promiscuity between German girls and men of the occupying forces. The V.D. rate in the American army is the highest ever recorded, 28 per cent. The promiscuity rate is far higher. Young men of eighteen and nineteen are living amidst a people whose life is infectively abnormal.

But Germany has not only lost men. She has lost a large number of the very men who might have helped her to a recovery of sanity.

The June number of the *Round Table* contained an article on Helmuth von Moltke, together with some of his letters. Von Moltke was shot by the Nazis in January 1945, along with a group of his friends. He was thirty-nine. He was marked down by the Nazis as an enemy from the very earliest days. He was strongly independent in mind, trained to become a German judge. In the years before the war he frequently visited England, to which he was warmly attached, and was called to the English Bar. At the outbreak of war he was called upon to join the supreme command of the armed forces as adviser on international law. The work gave him security from the Gestapo and opportunities for warning and rescuing intended victims of the Nazis in Norway, Denmark and France. It also brought him into contact with several groups of officers who from various motives had begun as early as 1938 to lay plans for action against the Nazi regime.

Von Moltke and his great friend, Peter Yorck, were not, however, closely associated with the military anti-Nazi groups. They were far less concerned with the means of overthrowing the Nazi regime than with the steps which would have to be taken to rebuild Germany when Nazism, as they were convinced it would, collapsed from within because of its inherently evil character and because of the rising resistance to it of people who were prepared to suffer

at its hands. He saw Nazism not just as a corrupt political creed, but as a spiritual canker of the human heart which defeat would not necessarily obliterate. He managed to get a letter to a friend in England in 1942. This is reprinted in full in the *Round Table*. In it he said " thousands of Germans who survive will be dead mentally ", and he spoke of the spiritual awakening, chiefly in the Christian confession, to the real evils of Nazism. " To-day," he said, " it is beginning to dawn on a not too numerous but active part of the population not that they have been misled, not that they are in for a hard time, not that they might lose the war, but that what is done is sinful. . . . Perhaps you will remember that in discussions before the war I maintained that belief in God was not essential for coming to the results you arrive at. To-day I know I was wrong, completely wrong. You know that I have fought the Nazis from the first day, but the amount of risk and readiness for sacrifice which is asked from us now, and that which may be asked from us tomorrow require more than right ethical principles, especially as we know that the success of our fight will probably mean a total collapse as a national unit. But we are ready to face this."

At the same time von Moltke and his friends were meeting in a group which took its name from his estate—the Kreisau Group. They discussed plans for the government of Germany after the collapse (whether this came by defeat or by internal collapse), including regionalization under special commissioners for an interim period, and the trial of war criminals before an international court at the Hague. On a charge of warning a man of imminent arrest, enabling him to escape, von Moltke was arrested, imprisoned and tried. A long letter describing the trial is of the very greatest interest. He was accused of discussing the possibility of the Nazi collapse with Jesuit priests, Protestant ministers and a bishop. The end was a foregone conclusion. In his letter he recounts the closing tirade of the judge, Freisler, against him: " Where do you get your orders from? You get your orders from the Führer, and the National Socialist Party! That goes for you as much as for any other German,

and anyone who takes his orders, no matter how indirectly, from the agents of the other world, is taking them from the enemy, and will be dealt with accordingly!" Yet he died well satisfied. "Taking it all in all," he wrote, "this emphasis on the religious aspect of the case corresponds with the real circumstances, and shows that Freisler is, after all, a good judge from the political angle. This gives us the inestimable advantage of being killed for something which (*a*) we really have done, and which (*b*) is worth while. . . . It is established that at no time did we design to use force; it is further established that we did not take a single, solitary step towards setting up any sort of organization, nor question anyone as to his readiness to take over any particular post; though the indictment stated otherwise. We merely *thought*. And in face of the thoughts of these three isolated men, their mere thoughts, National Socialism gets in such a panic that it wants to root out everything they may have infected. There 's a compliment for you!"

There have been popular talks by the B.B.C. and articles in the press about the attempt on Hitler's life on July 20th. The general impression given is that the only resistance to Nazism came from generals and high-ranking soldiers whose professional pride put them at loggerheads with Hitler. The Nazis themselves clearly thought von Moltke, his Christian friends and their thoughts, as dangerous as generals and their bombs. Anybody who had had any association with this group was arrested and nearly all were executed. Eugen Gerstenmaier escaped and is now head of the German Protestant Church's relief work. The loss of these men whom Germany so desperately needs now has not figured in popular accounts of the German resistance, but it ought to be given prominence, not only to adjust a distorted account of a particular historical event, but to remind us that any picture of Germany is incomplete which omits those who died, not because they thought Nazi policy disastrous, but because they believed Nazism to be of the devil.

Kathleen Bliss

CHRISTIANS IN POLITICS

II—CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE IN POLITICS

We are living in one of the critical transitional periods in history. Decisions taken in politics were never more important. Yet direct or obvious Christian influence in politics in this country at present does not appear to be great. Many Christians are not deeply concerned about this because they believe that " religion has nothing to do with politics ". Some take this view because they fear the improper use of clerical authority in party warfare and think that Christianity should be content with providing a generalized ethical background for political action. Others do so because they conceive the Christian life as a matter purely of a personal relationship between the believer and his Lord and dismiss politics as a worldly affair to which the Christian should pay little or no attention. The first group ignore the fact that Christians have a distinctive understanding of God, man and society, which needs to be articulated and worked out in political terms if it is to be realized. To leave it to chance, especially in complex times like the present, is generally to let the Christian case go by default. The second group ignore the fact that because Jesus Christ is Lord over the whole of life, the whole of their lives must be brought within the sphere of Christian obedience.

One of the enduring trends in political history in this country has been the slow subjection of private centres of power to the will of the people as a whole. The earliest of such centres to be swept away were the private armies of wealthy citizens which were an intolerable threat to the lives and property of peaceful citizens. Every new centre of power has in time submitted to abolition, limitation or radical change. But whereas in past centuries power has passed from barons to king, from feudal overlords to bourgeoisie, from country landowners to industrial capitalists and new and unexpected centres of power have risen

and replaced the old, now all centres of power are passing the same way home—into the arms of the state. At the same time there seems to be no prospect of new centres of power rising outside that of the state, and no new revolutions as unexpected and as far reaching as the Industrial Revolution, bringing about a new society and a wholly new kind of power-centre. If therefore the state is not to gather to itself an amalgam of all the powers of barons, kings, industrial magnates, press lords, scientific inventors, judges and policemen, absolute and uncontrolled, the whole body of citizens has to work upon the state in such a way as to determine its character. On them rests the responsibility of applying the principle " divide and rule " in a new way : that is, they must see to it that the state itself is a balance of powers within itself (as, for example, between local and central government), that balance finding its completest expression in the institution of Parliament in which the leader of the opposition is not a free lance outsider but, like the members of the Government, a paid servant of the Crown.

INDIFFERENCE TO POLITICS—PRINCIPLE OR NEGLECT?

All this would be too obvious and too commonplace to need constant reiteration were it not for the indifference to its importance which is manifested in the behaviour of most citizens and not least in that of those who are members of Christian Churches. An examination of membership of local churches and of local political parties reveal no significant overlap. The number of Christians who play no active part in politics because they are convinced that it is wrong to do so on the ground of principle is small. The great majority of Christians are perfectly willing to grant that there is no reason why a Christian should not engage in politics, and as far as we can judge the discussion of " Christianity in politics " is on the increase in pulpits and Church groups. But somehow or other the point of engagement is seldom reached, and this is one of the clearest distinctions between the generations within the Church, for we have in the older generation very many

who have taken and still take an active part in local government or party politics, but very few among the under-forties.

There is a considerable literature of political principles and their relation to Christ, but very little practical guidance has been given for Christian action in politics, in the light of an intimate knowledge of the actual facts of the political situation and a clear understanding of Christian principles.[1]

One of the results of this is that even those Christians who are actually engaged in politics have no common views on the situations which they are engaged in handling, except on issues where a directly " religious " interest is involved (e.g. the matter of church schools). In many cases their political philosophy and criteria for political judgment are held alongside rather than being rooted in, their Christian belief. Outside Parliament how many Christians are aware of how much depends upon the quality of the men returned to Westminster.

THE CHOICE OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

What happens to-day is not that large numbers of Christians make powerful efforts to improve the quality of the Houses of Parliament, and that their efforts break in vain upon a sea-wall of hostility and indifference, but that they do not make the attempt at all with any seriousness. At the same time they are not slow to bemoan the shortcomings of Parliament.

The House of Commons is composed of 640 men and women, elected from time to time from say 1,700 or so candidates who have been nominated for election by their fellow-citizens. The personal quality of the House is limited by the quality of those 1,700 candidates. Yet how many people who would assert that it is imperative for us to have a Parliament which pays due deference to Christian principles, have exerted themselves to take the smallest part in selecting candidates for Parliament or have

[1] A useful introduction can be found in Mr. Maurice Reckett's *Christians in Politics* (S.P.C.K.) 3/6 net.

any picture in mind as to what combination of qualities makes a good candidate or even know how such a selection is made?

PARTY POLITICS

It may be objected that many Christian people who might be prepared to do more about this matter than they do at present are debarred from doing so because of the fact of the party system. To have any say in the choice of candidates they would have to belong to a political party, and to belong to a political party, they argue, would compromise their conscience and impede their freedom of action. If this were true, then it may be observed that it would be incumbent upon Christians to consider with a quite new seriousness the possibility of creating means of political expression for themselves alternative to those provided by the parties. In particular, they would be compelled to prove that in the present state of this country, a responsible democracy can be run without parties which have rules and procedures not unlike those which already exist. But how many of us really believe that the party system provides a barrier to Christian participation in politics? There are men in all the major political parties who are sincere Christians, and few people believe in practice that they have compromised their faith by entering public life as members of a party. It is true that, except in special circumstances, ministers of churches should not be too closely associated with particular political parties, but that is not the same thing as saying that no Christians should.

On the contrary, a very good case can be made out for the contention that it is a sign both of spiritual and political immaturity for a Christian to feel inhibited from entering politics because of the moral difficulties created for him by the party system as it has developed in this country. Those moral difficulties are greatly exaggerated by those Christians who imagine that Christians can act with any relevance only in situations where there cannot be the faintest suspicion of the corrupting influence of evil. Politics is not a unique field in this respect: every field

of secular life is full of tensions and of acute moral decisions. Sheer hard facts beat upon his ideals and the Christian has to distinguish between valid and invalid compromise. We accept this element in economic life because we have to eat and live; we cannot retract from earning our living as easily as we can retract from our political responsibilities; we therefore tend to minimize the element of moral tension in that field from which we cannot escape and to exaggerate it in that field from which we would like an excuse for removing ourselves. Christian political action, except in rare instances, always involves co-operation with non-Christians, and party discipline as it exists in this country ordinarily imposes no greater restraints on the conscience of individuals than any group must if it is to be united for effective common action. Should an issue arise where the Christian feels he can on no account compromise, he is always free to say so and either to stand his ground and fight or to withdraw. On a longer view, his Christian understanding of the corrupting influence of power and the need, therefore, for vigilant criticism of Government by the Opposition should make him welcome the British party system and strive to maintain and strengthen it rather than to keep out of politics because he thinks his conscience would be irretrievably compromised by his participation in it. It may well be that as things are at present he may think that no party programme expresses very clearly the policy which he would like to see adopted. But this is true not only of politics but of life, where Christians have always to begin with what *is* and not with what they would like. It is a virtue of the British party system that party divisions are not rigid and that party programmes are changeable, and in the ordinary way, the Christian in politics is likely to be more effective inside a major party than by taking an independent position.

THE LOCAL PARTY MACHINE

It is only in some cases that party machines, especially in local branches, are in the hands of tightly-organized caucuses who

resist the attempts of outsiders to participate in political affairs. Those who are already engaged in politics are generally so oppressed by public apathy that they are only too grateful to discover someone who has a lively interest in politics, and above all, who is prepared to do some solid work for the cause. Office in the local branch of a party is often easy enough to obtain by anyone of reasonable competence who is prepared to do the drudgery it entails and such posts are often stepping-stones to real political influence. Whatever may be true of the top there is plenty of room at the bottom in politics and the bottom is the place to make a start. Some Christians are tempted to assume that their Christian profession entitles them to an easy road into politics and that the fact that they have high ideals and an ambitious programme should exempt them from the painful apprenticeship in political drudgery. It is well that they should be disillusioned. We have no right to say that Christian influence cannot be exercised in politics till we have tried, and if we are prepared to put enough time and energy into it there is, in most cases, no particular difficulty about trying.

Every Christian cannot be expected to go into politics, but few of us, especially if we hold responsible office in the Church, can have much excuse for not understanding the elements of the democratic systems under which we live. The more the case is pressed that the Church ought to make its voice heard in human affairs, the stronger becomes the obligation upon each individual Christian to understand the simple principles of the machine whereby decisions are reached and put into effect. The clearest evidence of a weakness here comes from local government. The experience of those who take part in local government is that very few people realize, especially in large cities, that they have their own directly elected representatives on the local council, whose function is to control the policy of the executive officials to see that reasonable grievances on the part of the public are redressed and their complaints and sug-

gestions are enquired into. This is obvious enough, yet the idea is very widespread that no buffer at all stands between bureaucracy and the powerless individual, who is apt to write stinging letters to the local paper about " our terrible council " instead of saying a word or sending a note to one of the councillors whom he voted on (or neglected to vote on) at the last election. If, as most of us believe to-day, there is a Christian interest involved in trying to make democracy work as an effective and responsible system of government, we have a duty to use, and to educate Christian people in the use of, the proper machinery of democratic procedure.

PRACTISING DEMOCRACY

This is important for Christian strategy in relation to politics because Christians often show a similar disregard for the proper working of democratic institutions even when they show some concern for politics. They often content themselves with passing resolutions at conferences or sending letters to papers or producing reports or pamphlets or possibly, on a very important matter, organizing a deputation to wait upon a minister after government policy has been forged, instead of doing the much more simple thing of getting in touch with the elected representatives of people, more especially as it still sometimes happens that those representatives turn out to be Christians. Numerous study groups and pamphlets were produced by Christians about housing in the years between the wars, but would they have been as effective as real direct attempts in each district and constituency to keep members of councils and parliament up to scratch on such matters ?

This is not to say that Christians should, therefore, organize themselves into high-power pressure-groups to start lobbying campaigns. Churches are particularly open to this temptation when their own interests become a matter of political debate. The trouble with much political activity which bears the distinctive title of Christian is that it already bears too many resem-

blances to "pressure". Almost the only occasions on which the ordinary member of Parliament receives any communications which mention Christianity are when certain Church bodies let loose upon him a flood of literature about a matter like Sabbath Observance and provide all their subscribers in his constituency with a draft letter or a printed petition to send to him. One M.P. remarked that if he were to judge by his correspondence alone, the Christian people of this country have had no interest in the work of Parliament in the war years except on one point: they rose in their strength and demanded that Parliament should keep our nation Christian by rejecting the order permitting Sunday theatres.

Christian activity in politics has to begin to take a new form. The old links between Anglicanism and Conservatism and the Free Churches and the Liberal party and the Trade Union Movement have weakened. Nothing very clear has as yet taken their place, nor have they been re-thought to see what elements which were good in them ought to survive. These associations were far from incidental; the very nature of the Conservative party and of the Trade Unions were affected by these associations. Different confessions produce different casts of mind, outlook and experience. There are political outlets which are proper to one type of mind and not to others. Where does the kind of man produced by this or that religious tradition find a way of political working which is of a piece with his whole being? This question needs thought inside the Churches. If there had been half the energy put into drawing upon the experience of Christian men and women in local and national politics which has been put into, say, articulating the experience of the Christian educationists, we should have more to build upon. But it is not all too late to make such a beginning in discovering the obedience of the Christian man in politics.

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